

Sevda Mutlu

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SEVDA MUTLU
smutlu75@gmail.com

DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN CONSCIOUSNESS IN *ERASMUS* STUDENTS⁴

ABSTRACT

This research is the content analysis of 502 *Erasmus* students' experiences published in the website www.20erasmus.eu. One of the main purposes of the *Erasmus Student Exchange Program* is to maintain a cross-cultural dialogue through student activity, to remove prejudices and thus to strengthen interaction and join EU citizens under such concepts as "European Consciousness" and "Being European". The purpose of this study is to determine how successful the *Erasmus Student Exchange Program* is through the shared *Erasmus* experiences of the participating students.

In conclusion, in this research, it is observed that the students talked highly positively about the *Erasmus* experience. The students described this process as enjoyable and productive. It could be argued that the *Erasmus* experience contributed to students' "individual development" rather than "academic development". It could also be maintained that one of the key purposes of the *Erasmus* exchange program is to remove prejudices by maintaining student mobility and cross-cultural dialogue and to unite societies under the *European Consciousness* and *European People* understanding via strengthening interactions between EU member citizens. Data collected in this research present evidence that the *Erasmus* programme has reached this aim.

Key words: EU, European Consciousness, *Erasmus* Student, Academic Experience, Personal Experience.

INTRODUCTION

Student activity is an increasing phenomenon not only in Europe, but also in other parts of the world. "Internationalization in higher education is an inevitable result of the globalized and knowledge-based economy of the 21st century" (Altbach, Teichler 2001). Although European Union members have common political and economic principles, due to the differences in their cultural and educational policies, they had to create a common educational policy and strategy. For this reason, "**Education in a single Europe**" had to be supported. (Brock, Tulasiewicz 1999, p. x). Therefore, one of the latest and significant integration policies of the EU has been the *Erasmus Student Exchange* program. In order to guarantee the safety of the EU's future and to provide young people with education, with the process of *The European Higher Education Bologna*, education has been reshaped. "Both the Bologna Process and the general globalization trend seem to support student mobility in some respects but to set new barriers in other respects" (Rivza, Teichler 2007, p. 61). What makes *Erasmus* student program more significant in comparison with other student activities is that, the program is

⁴ Some data from this study have been presented as a paper in the ERCON 2010, *Erasmus* Coordinators Conference Vienna.

completely financed by the EU and it is short. The number of students benefiting from this program is increasing every day. For this reason, more and more students benefit from it and will continue to do so.

The Erasmus program is one of the most important tools the EU uses to create a "European consciousness". "Since 1988, the development of the »European dimension« in education in order to reinforce the European identity/citizenship, to increase awareness of common socio-political issues and to enhance knowledge of the historical and cultural aspects of Europe has become an EU leitmotif. The educational community welcomed this approach that was closer to educational ideals than a purely economic rationale. The White Paper on the »Learning Society« acknowledged that »education and training will increasingly become the main vehicle for self-awareness, belonging, advancement and self-fulfillment« and stressed that »education lays the foundation of awareness and European citizenship.«" (Papatsiba 2005, s. 176). The Erasmus student exchange program aims at internalizing Europeans within a "European Consciousness" (Byram 2001, p. 108).

"Academic exchange and internationalization are viewed as among the »success stories« of innovation in 20th century higher education. At the end of the century and the beginning of the new millennium, there is widespread agreement that internationalization is a key element of the future of higher education. Some experts, for example, even claim that *SOCRATES/ERASMUS* has been the most successful single component of EU policy" (Altbach, Teichler 2001, p. 10). According to Teichler, the Erasmus program achieves an international success: 1. EU policy was successful in moving cross border student mobility in Europe from an exceptional phenomenon, for which the students were largely responsible themselves, to a phenomenon the success of which became a concern for the higher education institutions. 2. *ERASMUS* succeeded (to some extent) in counterbalancing the imbalances of intra-European exchange. 3. *ERASMUS* clearly encouraged cooperation in curricular matters. 4. *ERASMUS* promoted European cooperation and the 'European dimension' of higher education in a way that European activities increased in quantity and weight, without contradicting internationalization in any principal respect. *ERASMUS*, thus, speeded up internationalization of European institutions of higher education (1999, p. 12). At the same time we are aware that not only European-level policies such as the *Erasmus* programme affect national policies" (Huisman 2004, p.2).

The *Erasmus* program has been gaining the attention of researchers recently, due to its international success and its effect on the union of the EU (the most important effect being the dialogue between cultures). "the *Erasmus* program is a good opportunity to collect exciting data, because it rings together people from different countries, who have now become ubiquitous in institutions of higher education. As *Erasmus* »groups« are constantly in nascendi (students never stay more than 9 months in the host country), the phenomenon allows various societal and intercultural issues to be looked at such as the creation of relationships, adaptation to host countries, management of identity, the development of intercultural competence. In other words, it is one of the best laboratories available for researchers" (Devrin 1984, 170). This research has been done in the mentioned laboratory. The experiences of those *Erasmus* students which can be found in the web site: www.20Erasmus.eu

have been analyzed contextually. The study aims to understand whether *Erasmus* students place particular emphasis on their academic developments or personal developments in evaluating their *Erasmus* experiences. Therefore, *Erasmus* experiences are going to be analyzed using two principal categories, “academic development” and “personal development”, and the distribution of word frequencies associated with each will be examined using content analysis methods.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In this research, the content analysis method has been used. 502 students who have had an *Erasmus* experience have shared these in the www.20Erasmus.eu web site. This study aims to identify the most frequently mentioned concepts in response to the *Erasmus* experience-related questions “Did you grow-up? Was this experience useful for your life and for your career? Did you feel like home away from home? Did *Erasmus* change your life? Do you miss that time?” published in the website www.20Erasmus.eu, the context (positive/negative) and the attitudes towards *Erasmus* program via content analysis. These experiences have each been scanned and analyzed. The 502 *Erasmus* experiences were conducted via Simple Concordance 4.0.7. program. Thus, the total word number and word frequency could be presented in tables.

“Content analysis is a highly flexible research method that has been widely used in library and information science (LIS) studies with varying research goals and objectives. Based on a basic communications model of sender/ message/ receiver, initially researchers emphasized making inferences based on quantified analysis of recurring, easily identifiable aspects of text content, sometimes referred to as manifest content. Since then, researchers in many fields, including anthropology, library and information studies (LIS), management, political science, psychology, and sociology, have used content analysis. In the process, they have adapted content analysis to suit the unique needs of their research questions and strategies and have developed a cluster of techniques and approaches for analyzing text grouped under the broad term of textual analysis” (White, Marsh 2006, 22-23).

DATA

The text which underwent content analysis comprises 100443 words. These were written in 8466 different words. The longest sentence contains 2.254 words. The shortest sentence contains 2 words.

HYPOTHESES

1. The *Erasmus* experience is a highly beneficial period for students. It serves to develop the students personally, rather than academically.
2. The *Erasmus* experience helps the students to look within themselves and understand themselves better.
3. The *Erasmus* experience gives the students a chance to establish cross-cultural dialogues and thus forms a European Consciousness in students, who are alienated from their prejudices.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *ERASMUS EXPERIENCES*, TABLES AND COMMENTS

The country distribution of the students sharing *Erasmus* experiences reveals that the highest rate of contribution belongs to Italy and Spain, France, Poland and Portugal.

Tab. 1. Distribution of *Erasmus* Experiences By Country

Country name	Number of <i>Erasmus</i> Experience	%	Country name	Number of <i>Erasmus</i> Experience	%
Italy	109	21.58	UK	13	2.57
Spain	59	11.68	Czech Republic	10	1.98
France	35	6.93	Slovakia	8	1.58
Poland	34	6.73	Hungary	8	1.58
Portugal	34	6.73	Bulgaria	7	1.39
Belgium	28	5.54	Lithuania	5	0.99
Germany	26	5.15	Estonia	4	0.79
Romania	22	4.36	Austria	4	0.79
Sweden	21	4.16	Latvia	3	0.59
Netherland	19	3.76	Ireland	3	0.59
Finland	17	3.37	Slovenia	3	0.59
Greece	15	2.97	Denmark	2	0.40
Turkey	14	2.77	Norway	2	0.40
Sum				502	100.00

Source: prepared by author.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *ERASMUS EXPERIENCE* TITLES

Data: *The Erasmus Experience* titles text which underwent content analysis comprises 2562 words. These were written in 495 different words.

Tab. 2. The frequency distribution of the words used in *Erasmus* experience titles

Range	Word	Frequency	%
1	Discover	137	31.07
2	Life	70	15.87
3	Love	58	13.15
4	Dream	44	9.98
5	Touch	38	8.62
6	<i>Erasmus</i>	29	6.58
7	World	25	5.67
8	Europe	17	3.85
9	Experience	13	2.95
10	Friend	10	2.27
	Sum	441	100.00

Source: prepared by author.

According to Table 2, the total of the words ranking in top 10 is 441. The fact that the exclamation mark (!) was used 232 times in the titles is an indication of the excitement with which students talk about their experiences. Students used the concept “discover” most frequently in the experience title. 23 students used the expression “we discovered”, while 114 used the expression “I discovered”. Thus, one can infer that the *Erasmus* experience is a relatively individualistic and personal experience.

The usage contexts of the concepts in the table are as follows:

1. Discover

It was also observed that the students used the word “discover” most frequently in relation to “themselves” and “life”.

a) The students emphasized the following in their discoveries related to themselves:

I discovered -----→ myself, my limits, a new side of me, myself differently, a new me, my identity, my reality, I discovered myself being happy, who I really am, another me

b) The students emphasized the following in their discoveries related to life:

I discovered -----→ a new way of life, So much about life, what life is, How good life can be, lovely lifestyle, a new life, a new way of life, the meaning of life, easy life, how much life can, different ways of life, *Erasmus* life.

c) Other subjects and areas discovered by students are as follows:

I discovered -----→ Multiculturalism, international, Europe, a wonderful place, true emotions, home away from home, the world, new world, others, paradise, similarities, dreams, magic of cultures, sing Language, universe, diversity, rainbow world joy, a great friendship, many new people, so many things, love, hundreds of different worlds, the heaven, diversity, happiness, European essence, pure and unlimited freedom, what is the mix of nations, each other, other world.

At this point, it could be argued that students’ range of exploration is highly diverse.

2. Life

The second most frequently used concept in the experience title is “life”. The word “life” is mostly used together with “discovery”, which is also mentioned above.

Apart from this, an analysis of the meaning and context in which life was used shows that; I had the time of my life, I had the best time/year of my life, I had change my life, I had Experience a new life, I started a new life, I did the best decision of my life, I smelled/ my life, I touched real life, I widen my life, We saw the heaven of life.

As can be seen, students used the concept life in both concrete and positive sense.

3. Love

An analysis of the concept love shows that; Every single minute, this time, *Erasmus* sharing cultures, Eastern Europe, Europe, to be Erasmus person, my Erasmus time, every single day, host country.

4. Dream

An analysis of the concept dream shows the following:

It was also observed that the students use the concept of dream in two senses;

- a) That they realized their dreams through the *Erasmus* experience;
- b) That their Erasmus experience was like a dream and they had a dream

during this process.

Both senses encompass a positive meaning and a feeling of excitement.

5. Touch

The concept of touched is as follows:

I/we touched.....Sky, Europea, my dreams, time, endless, happiness, my life, my soul, dream, the paradise.

6. Erasmus

In relation to the use of the *Erasmus* concept: The students mentioned that they felt, discovered and loved *Erasmus*.

7. World

As for the concept "world": Students used the concept "world" in two senses;

1. The concrete and physical sense: to see new places in the world and discover the variety and colour in the world.
2. The abstract sense: to see different worlds, to explore their own world.

8. Europe

The use of the concept "Europe" is as follows: The students stated that they explored, felt, loved and lived the spirit of, Europe and the meaning of EU. It is interesting that the students stated having discovered Europe and living the European spirit although the majority were of European origin. It can be seen that the Erasmus programme helped develop an awareness of Europe and Europeans.

9. Experience

The students used the experience concept with highly positive adjectives: They described the experience concept with the adjectives "great, wonderful, beautiful, exciting, changing". Also, they expressed that they experienced a new and different lifestyle and future.

10. Friend

The concept of friends: The students said that they met friends from different parts of the world and built friendships that would last forever. The contextual analysis of the experience titles used by the students, shows that this experience process has had very positive effects on them. We may categorize these positive effects into three:

1. Discovering themselves,
2. Discovering different cultures and
3. Gaining a European consciousness.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *ERASMUS EXPERIENCES*

The text which underwent content analysis is comprised of 100443 words. These were written in 8466 different words. The longest sentence contains 2.254 words. The shortest sentence contains 2 words.

Tab. 3. The frequency distribution of the words used in Erasmus experiences

Range	Word	Frequency	%
1	<i>Erasmus</i>	1007	18.6
2	People	631	11.6
3	Life	599	11.1
4	Friends	462	8.5
5	Experience	450	8.3
6	Time	438	8.1
7	Student	391	7.2
8	New	364	6.7
9	Different	284	5.3
10	Other	253	4.7
11	World	218	4.0
12	University	165	3.0
13	Language	157	2.9
	Sum	5419	100.0

Source: prepared by author.

According to the table, the sum of the words in the 13 most frequently used words is 5419. While 156 students used the expression “My *Erasmus*”, 17 students used “our *Erasmus*” and 5 students used “your *Erasmus*”.

1. *Erasmus*

The “*Erasmus*” concept was most frequently used in the *Erasmus* experiences. It is evident that the students have created an “*Erasmus* terminology”. This terminology is composed of naturally emerging concepts formed as a result of the students’ experiences. They can express many things that they feel and they understand each other by means of these concepts.

Tab. 4. Erasmus Terminology

Word	Frequency	%	Word	Frequency	%
<i>Erasmus</i> students	129	31.23	<i>Erasmus</i> studies	3	0.73
<i>Erasmus</i> experience	78	18.89	<i>Erasmus</i> language	3	0.73
<i>Erasmus</i> year	30	7.26	<i>Erasmus</i> days	3	0.73
<i>Erasmus</i> friend	24	5.81	<i>Erasmus</i> network	2	0.48
<i>Erasmus</i> programme	21	5.08	<i>Erasmus</i> money	2	0.48
<i>Erasmus</i> life	21	5.08	<i>Erasmus</i> dream	2	0.48
<i>Erasmus</i> people	14	3.39	<i>Erasmus</i> community	2	0.48
<i>Erasmus</i> time	13	3.15	<i>Erasmus</i> night	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> family	9	2.18	<i>Erasmus</i> generation	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> parties	7	1.69	<i>Erasmus</i> nick	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> spirit	7	1.69	<i>Erasmus</i> nationality	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> group	7	1.69	<i>Erasmus</i> story	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> period	7	1.69	<i>Erasmus</i> world	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> semester	4	0.97	<i>Erasmus</i> gift	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> scholarship	4	0.97	<i>Erasmus</i> girl	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> bar	4	0.97	<i>Erasmus</i> association	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> months	4	0.97	<i>Erasmus</i> trip	1	0.24
<i>Erasmus</i> section	3	0.73			
Sum				413	100,00

Source: prepared by author.

One of the most used and prominent concepts is the *Erasmus Spirit*. *Erasmus* spirit does not have a concise definition; however, what *Erasmus* spirit encompasses can be listed on the basis of data collected via content analysis. The *Erasmus* spirit includes discovering primarily oneself, new places, new tastes; making new friends, having fun in *Erasmus* parties, entertainment and travelling. The *Erasmus* spirit does not contain prejudices, isolation, national, ethnic and religious identities.

As expressed by a student (Karolina from Wrocław: "We were like a family" 2006):

It had no meaning whether you were from Poland, Turkey or Greece
 It had no meaning whether you were a Catholic, Muslim or Orthodox
 It had no meaning whether you liked heavy metal or techno
 It had no meaning whether you were straight or gay
 It had no meaning whether you liked cats or dogs

Erasmus concept has been most used with these adjectives and this frequently: Great *Erasmus* (251), first *Erasmus* (250), very *Erasmus* (248), best *Erasmus* (245), love *Erasmus* (148), wonderful *Erasmus* (93), beautiful *Erasmus* (86), fun *Erasmus* (84), nice *Erasmus* (84), better *Erasmus* (81), enjoy *Erasmus* (72), thanks *Erasmus* (67), perfect *Erasmus* (37), funny *Erasmus* (35), bad *Erasmus* (32)

Some notable expressions used in *Erasmus* are as follows: Some significant expressions taken from the experiences of students are as follows:

- "*Erasmus* life it's unreal"
- "It is unique"
- "*Erasmus* in my soul"
- "My *Erasmus* was AMAZING"

- “*Erasmus* is a special time”
- “Be *Erasmus*!!!!”
- “*Erasmus* generation is the future of Europe and we will keep it living”
- “*ERASMUS* spirits is still running around the World”
- “There is a before and an after *Erasmus* in my life”.
- “My *Erasmus* was breathtaking”
- “*Erasmus* as a new beginning”
- “I didn’t expect my *Erasmus* to turn out such an international experience.
- “Have you ever met somebody with a bad experience on *Erasmus* programme? Stop searching you will not find it”.

This is how the *Erasmus* concept was used by the students:

1. The majority of the students stated that *Erasmus* changed them and their lives to a great extent.
2. They evaluated the process as joyous, enjoyable and productive.
3. The number of people expressing gratitude for the *Erasmus* is unignorable. In addition, they expressed wishes like “God save *Erasmus*” and “Long live *Erasmus*”.
4. Most of the students expressed that they explored and found about themselves through *Erasmus*.
5. They stated that talking about and describing *Erasmus* is not easy and that people lacking this experience would have difficulty understanding this.
6. *Erasmus* is highly recommended for everyone. They even describe the process as indescribable and a must for everyone. Some even have recommendations like “Do not attend *Erasmus*, live *Erasmus*!”.
7. The number of students who state that they will never forget those days is also high.
8. Most of the students want to return back to the *Erasmus* period.
9. They think that *Erasmus* is not “a waste of time”.
10. They long for the *Erasmus* period and friends.
11. Some evaluate *Erasmus* as a chance.
12. Students state that *Erasmus* never ends. It could be argued that its effect continues despite having ended as an action.
13. Five students stated they found their husbands and five stated they found their wives in this experience.
14. Many students think that *Erasmus* has created a new culture.
15. They evaluated *Erasmus* as an important period in their lives.
16. A student pointed to similarities between Plato’s metaphor of cave and *Erasmus*.
17. There are even some who say “I wish I could stay as an *Erasmus* student forever”.
18. The number of students saying “*Erasmus* was the best decision in my life” is quite high.
19. The students stated that they became more positive thanks to *Erasmus*. Again, the number of people wishing to participate in the *Erasmus* program is quite high.

20. There are a few students who separate their lives into two periods: *Pre-Erasmus* and *Post-Erasmus*.
21. There are many students who think that *Erasmus* put an end to their routine life style and made them more European.
22. There are only a few students who think that the *Erasmus* funding was insufficient.
23. There are even people who identify themselves with *Erasmus* and go so far as to say: "We were *Erasmus*".
24. Two students have coded *Erasmus* exactly as follows:

Petra from Slovakia, "We want it back", 2006: DJ Nash, from Madrid "I upgraded myself", 2002:

E - eternal friendships	European
R - romance	Romantic/Responsible
A -anything was possible	Ambassador
Z - zest for travelling	Strengthening
M - more than a student exchange programme	Mankind
U - unbelievable experiences	Union
S - socializing	Smoothly

2. People

The second most frequently used word is People.

It can be observed that expressions related to meeting people from new and different cultures, and the expressions "there aren't people categories", "unite people in diversity", "*Erasmus* people were/are unique" are frequently used. The students also pointed to the fact that people are very similar to each other and could be close to each other despite coming from distant places and mentioned the shared beauties. It can also be seen that the adjectives used in relation to the concept of people have highly positive connotations: wonderful, special, fantastic, important, good, great, enjoy, the best, the nicest, the greatest, happy, friendly people.

The description of a new person type is evident: *Erasmus* people. There are also positive opinions of the local people.

Here, there is no discrimination and otherisation in the use of "other people".

Samples of referring to other people are listed below:

1. A student mentioned s/he has become more open to **other people**
2. A student mentioned sharing the same corridor with "12 **other people**".
3. That Erasmus taught a lot about themselves and **other people**.
4. That they were like a family, and the **others'** problems were also yours.
5. That they met **other people** from a different culture
6. That it opened the door to **other people**
7. That they cooperated with **other people**
8. That they were organized with **other people**

As can be seen, an otherisation is not present here. On the contrary, students emphasized forming a unity despite the differences.

It was observed that the concept of people was used negatively in only three places.

1. Bad people: A student mentioned her worries about being stalked by a male stranger she met in the tram while looking for the place she was supposed to stay and stated that it was difficult for her to save herself from the man.
2. Shallow people: A student mentioned the presence of some shallow people who became drunk in parties.
3. A French student (going to Italy) conceived of *Erasmus* as a waste of great amounts of money and thought that young people used this money for alcohol and drugs. He had witnessed that the students used most of their time consuming alcohol and drugs in *Erasmus* bars.

The main opinion of the students is:

1. There aren't people categories
2. Unite people in diversity
3. *Erasmus* people were/are unique. According to these statements, we can say that Erasmus students have won European consciousness.

3. Life

The third most frequently used concept is Life.

The fact that the concept "my life" was used 269 times indicates that the students told this experience from the perspective of their own lives. The most frequent use of the "life" concept is "the best day/time/ year/ period /part/decision of my life". Another frequently mentioned thing was that the *Erasmus* experience changed their lives. The concept of life often is used the following attributes: new life, different life, great life, magic life, perfect life, multinational life, amazing life, second life, social life, university life. A negative use of the life concept was not observed.

Two new uses of the life concept were noted:

- ***Erasmus* life** = The period spent as an *Erasmus* student in the host country.
- ***European* Life** = Making friends from different *European* societies, travelling and experiencing European life style.

4. Friend

They made friends from different cultures and countries and built good friendships and relationships. Shared activities like travelling with friends, going to the cinema and theatre, etc. were mentioned frequently. The majority of the students talked about the loneliness and the things they suffered from in the first days; however also mentioned that they overcame many difficulties soon by making new friends and built firm relationships. The number of people visiting their friends after *Erasmus* is unignorable. It is evident that the discovery of different places and cultures continues with friend visits after *Erasmus*. The concept of friend often is used the following attributes: new friend, best friend, good friend, great friend, foreign friend, special friend, nice friend, crazy friend, amazing friend, adorable friend, extraordinary friend, wonderful friend, lifelong friend, beautiful friend, closer friend, international friends, true friendships, strong friendship, universities friendship, unforgettable friendships, colorful friendship.

In this study, it has been determined that the students talk about their friendships very positively and very frequently. The texts related to the experiences of the students show that their friendships are not transitory, but temporary. The number of those who visit their friends' country after the *Erasmus* program is not low at all. These kinds of visits support being "A European" and "European Consciousness" after *Erasmus*.

5. Experience

The fact that the *Erasmus* experience was highly fruitful and beautiful was emphasized by students. No negative opinions were observed in relation to experience. As it may be seen from the student's statements, the *Erasmus* experience has been referred to with quite positive expressions, such as great, good, wonderful, beautiful, the best, incredible, richest, fantastic, useful, big, intercultural, fruitful, funny etc. A student even said: "Have you ever met somebody who has had a bad experience on the *Erasmus* program? Stop searching, you will not find it!".

6. Time

The most frequently used expression in the time concept was "First time". The students expressed that they lived the advantage of being in a different country and culture for the first time and felt pleased about this.

The concept of time often is used the following attributes; first, great, the best, long, *Erasmus*, good, free, wonderful, second, hard, The greatest, parties, special, turn back, trip, perfect, short, the craziest, intensive, don't waste, funny, leisure, studying, unforgettable, different, dormitory, memorable, is not lost, the happiest, commercial, marvellous, cool, nice time.

The students evaluated the *Erasmus* period in a highly positive way. Only two students viewed the period as a difficult time.

7. New

The students experienced a lot of new things within the *Erasmus* process. This is evident from the wide range of the concept "new". The concept of new often is used the following attributes: friends, people, country, cultures, language, experience, life, things, places, world, way, city, me, home, eyes, year, environment, opportunities, family, room, Europeans, EU, knowledge skills, persons, identity, foods, university feelings, style of life, situations staff, prospectives, nationality, projects, challenges, desires, plans, flat, couples, sight, adventure, business, impressions, start ideas, period, view, smells, social rules, self, beginning, landscape, perspective, economy, lessons, generation, revelation, options.

In the light of these attributes we can see how open young people are to innovation and new things. Therefore, we may say that young people are successful in establishing a cross-cultural dialogue.

8. Different

The concept of different often is used the following attributes: culture, countries, people, way of life, ways places, language, things, life perspective, parts,

approach, nationalities, angles, meals, backgrounds, students, companies, origin, university, viewpoints, emotion, conditions, tradition, environment, colours, technologies, reality, games, food, adventure signs, story, eyes, characters, time, accent, motives, programs, spices.

A student even said: "We were so different and so similar at the same time". It is possible to observe that, just like the usage of the concept of new explained above, the concept of different does not convey negativity either and that it has contributed greatly to the lives of the students.

9. Other

It can be seen that the word "other" was not used in the sense of otherisation, isolation or discrimination. On the contrary, the students feel excited about getting to know other students, about communicating and interacting with them. As a result, they acquire a European consciousness. The concept of other often is used the following attributes: students, countries, *Erasmus* students cultures, things, people, places, nation, languages, foreigners, side of life, foreign students, universities, periods, European, food, prejudices, their stuff, habits, perspectives, games, continent, dimension and other colours.

We can observe from the experiences that the *Erasmus* students have formed friendships with other *Erasmus* students, rather than the students of the host countries. *Erasmus* students who leave their homes for a temporary period and share the same environment with other *Erasmus* students meet in a common ground (in terms of adapting to a new place, acting together, etc.). Therefore, a multi-cultural dialogue comes into the picture. The dialogue between many visiting students ensures cross-cultural interaction and thus contributes to the development of European consciousness and forms integration.

10. World

The concept of world often is used the following attributes: a new, real, citizen of the world, marvellous, another, a better, unknown, my little, the world in a village, beautiful, big, a multicultural, fantastic and *Erasmus* world.

As for the concept "world", the students used it in two senses:

1. The concrete and physical sense: to see new places in the world and discover the variety and colour in the world.
2. The abstract sense: to see different worlds, to explore their own world.

11. University

The concept of university often is used the following attributes: host, modern, good, new, different system, guest. Although the main aim and function of the *Erasmus* program is concerned with university education, the concept of university was not frequently used in the students' experiences. The academic environments, educational system, relationships with the faculty were not mentioned frequently. For instance, the concept of library was used only four times. Usually the university names were mentioned.

12. Language

The concept of language often is used the following attributes: new, different, another, foreign, *Erasmus*, native, interesting, same, beautiful, body, nicely melodic, Local, very romantic, our own, second, odd and Universal language.

The process of learning a new language was frequently mentioned. The emphasis was on communication despite speaking different languages by making use of body language where possible and even creating a new Erasmus language. "*Erasmus language*": is not English, Spanish or French... It is the best way to understand the sense of living without speaking, just acting. They said that; "we discovered sign language and body language!"

It has also been observed that the students are highly willing to learn other languages. The students state that they spend an effort to learn other languages even after they go back to their own countries.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that, during the experience process, the students are happy about discovering a new "me", a new place, new culture and new tastes and making new friends and living the European spirit. The results of the study show parallels with the results of other studies conducted in this area. According to the results of a study by Renata Figlewicz and James Williams: "ERASMUS students in both countries have remained satisfied or very satisfied with their experiences in their host institutions over the course of the last few years. The ERASMUS year is viewed by those that participate as a worthwhile activity" (2005). Various evaluation studies have shown that almost all participating students are highly satisfied with the ERASMUS experience in another European country (Rivza & Teichler 2007, 67).

Although students go through various problems such as settling into a new environment, adapting, economic, and bureaucratic and language related efforts as expected, the study shows that the students almost never mentioned these problems. Therefore, it may be concluded that living the exciting sides of the Erasmus program (exploring new things) is much more important than the problems they experience. "The ERASMUS scheme for the mobility of students is generally viewed as a "success story". Even though bureaucratic procedures of the programme were often criticized as excessive and even though the stipends provided for students as a rule cover only part of the additional costs for study abroad, ERASMUS became extraordinarily popular" (Rivza, Teichler 2007, 67).

As Dervin comments on the study saying, "Erasmus experience could be one of the greatest training periods for hypermodernity", another study evaluates it as thus: "From the European decision makers' perspective, mobility represents a form of secondary socialization which relies on the individuals" (Papatsiba 2005, 178). Indeed, it has been observed that the students who have participated in this program have been very social. While this process is marked with exploring new places, culture and tastes, their relationships with their friends is also emphasized. During the program, it has also been observed that the students introduce their own cultures to their friends. Therefore, it may be defined as a second socialization period.

We see that, the European Consciousness is more developed in students who frequently mention "being together despite the differences", compared to those students who only talk about "being together". Another study shows that, students who become a part of the Erasmus experience have been able to dispose of a majority of their prejudices (Mutlu, Alacahan, Erdil, 2010).

CONCLUSION

In this study, it is observed that the students talked highly positively about the Erasmus experience. The students described this process as enjoyable and productive. The experiences of the students show that they use less frequently academic concepts (such as, university, science, course, instructor, library, research etc.), compared to those concepts about individual development (such as discovering themselves, new places, different cultures; friendships, living the European spirit, etc.)

It could be argued that the Erasmus experience contributed to students' 'individual development rather than academic development'. Another study confirms this result; according to this other research, a change has been observed in the students' motivation in the past three years. The study shows that, while there is a decrease in their motivation about career planning and academic life, there is an increase in their motivation about meeting a new environment (Report on Erasmus Students' Mobility Academic Year 2005/2006, s.3).

Although Europe and the EU have a common history and culture, Europe has witnessed two world wars, the European countries have fought against each other and Europe has witnessed bipolarity during the time of the cold war. Therefore, due to the wars and conflicts of the past, it is a fact that the European youth have certain prejudices against each other. It is possible to see that the students have left a majority of their prejudices behind through cross-cultural dialogue. The fact that there are almost no conflicting and aggressive expressions shows the fruitfulness of this experience. It is also possible to say that the students have developed a new identity.

We may say that, this individual development in the students helps the construction of a consciousness that is European. It could also be maintained that one of the key purposes of the Erasmus exchange program is to remove prejudices by maintaining student mobility and cross-cultural dialogue and to unite societies under concepts such as European Consciousness and Being European through strengthening interactions between EU member citizens. Data collected in this study present evidence that the Erasmus programme has reached this aim.

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